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THE RITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF  
YELLOW AMONG THE ROMANS

BY

FRANCIS MARION DANA

A THESIS

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PHILADELPHIA, PA.

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TO THE  
MEMBERS

The writer takes this opportunity to express her gratitude to those members of the department of Latin in the University of Pennsylvania under whom she has studied and to whose helpful encouragement throughout the preparation of this thesis she is deeply indebted: to Professors J. C. Rolfe, W. B. McDaniel, R. G. Kent, G. D. Hadzsits, H. B. Van Deventer and E. H. Heffner; and also to Dr. M. E. Armstrong, of Goucher College, for valuable suggestions in connection with this dissertation.

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## INTRODUCTION

The conventional significance of color occupies an important and little-understood position in the human thought of all ages, but it is only within recent years that any detailed study has been made of individual colors as being religiously symbolic. Among the ancient Romans, religion was almost entirely a matter of convention, and we should therefore expect to find that their religious rites were, in a large degree, fettered by a formalism which tended to produce an intricate system of symbolism. Such being the case, it has been for centuries the task of scholars to attempt to discover the meaning of certain religious rites, a meaning which the Romans themselves were far from understanding. In all these researches, however, there is but little mention of the significance of color, and it is the aim of this study to examine a part of this phase of Roman religion.

A recent study by Dr. M. E. Armstrong, of Goucher College, has accounted most satisfactorily for the use of scarlet, purple, black and white, and gold in Roman ritual, but no study has been made of the use of yellow, which is important particularly in the marriage ceremony. Of what natural phenomena was yellow the visible sign or representation, and what was the underlying idea which the Romans wished to express by its use? These are the questions which must be confronted in an investigation of this kind. In this connection the words found to be of the greatest importance are *luteus* and *croceus*. First of all, therefore, we have tried to collect, as nearly as possible, all the passages in which they occur, in order to decide the difference, if any, in their color denotation. Though it has been impossible to make separate mention of all the references collected for this purpose, those have been quoted which seem to bear especially upon the final decision.

A brief study of the word *flavus* revealed the fact that, with perhaps one exception, it has apparently no symbolical significance; therefore references to its use are few, and the discussion is confined for the most part to passages in which *luteus* or *croceus* occurs.

In an effort to discover the fundamental idea which the Romans wished to express by their use of yellow, it has been found necessary to introduce discussions of some length explanatory of several of the most important conceptions associated with Roman religion and private life.

Greek literature has been drawn upon only so far as it bears directly upon our discussion, and no exhaustive collection of material has been attempted in that field.

# THE RITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF YELLOW AMONG THE ROMANS

## COMPARISON OF COLOR TERMS

The word *yellow*, like all other general terms denoting one color or another in the English language, may be understood to indicate any one of a number of shades. Similarly in Latin, a somewhat wide range of tint variation must be given to such a general term as *luteus*, *croceus*, or *flavus*. Professor Price finds in the color system of Vergil forty-two pigments, and calculates that "each color term must cover on an average, the expression of twenty-six closely allied tints."<sup>1</sup> It is fair to draw the conclusion then that by a like study of other Latin authors somewhat the same result would be obtained, and that "for each color term, therefore, we must seek to find one color as the norm or axis of its chromatic power."

A study and comparison of the words *luteus* and *croceus* is interesting chiefly because of the similarity rather than the dissimilarity of the objects to which they are applied. Flowers,<sup>2</sup> flower seeds,<sup>3</sup> violets,<sup>4</sup> the aurora,<sup>5</sup> pallor of countenance,<sup>6</sup> the yolk of egg,<sup>7</sup> parchment,<sup>8</sup> flickering light,<sup>9</sup> are indifferently spoken of as *luteus* or *croceus*. Professor McCrea<sup>10</sup> arrives at the conclusion that Ovid's standard in nature for *luteus* is sulphur, judging from the line "luteave exiguis ardescunt sulpura

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<sup>1</sup> T. R. Price, *The Color System of Vergil*, *AJP*. IV, pp. 1-20.

<sup>2</sup> Avian. *Fab.* 26.5; Ov. *Met.* 3.509; Diosc. 4.125; Plin. *N. H.* 25.108; 26.57.

<sup>3</sup> Plin. *N. H.* 27.83; 21.49, 124.

<sup>4</sup> Colum. 9.4.4; Plin. *N. H.* 21.131; *Copa* 13. There is manuscript authority for the reading "et Cecropio" for "etiam croceo" in the last passage, a reading which would make the reference of no value here.

<sup>5</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 7.26; Ov. *Met.* 7.703; 13.579 f.; *Fast.* 4.714; *Ars* 3.179 f.; Sen. *Herc. F.* 124; Sidon. *Carm.* 22.48 f.; Auson. 431.1.

<sup>6</sup> Prud. *Cath.* 8.26-7; Tib. 1.8.52; Hor. *Epod.* 10.16; Pers. 3.95; Cass. Fel. 49, p. 128.9 (ed. Rose); Paul. Petric. *Mart.* 3.199.

<sup>7</sup> Mart. 13.40.1; Mart. Cap. 2.140; Cass. Fel. 78, p. 190.14 (ed. Rose); Marcell. *Med.* 4.15; Plin. *N. H.* 10.144, 148.

<sup>8</sup> Juv. 7.23; Tib. 3.1.9.

<sup>9</sup> Sol. 2.43; Apul. *Met.* 11.3.

<sup>10</sup> N. G. McCrea, *Ovid's Use of Colour and Colour Terms*, *Classical Studies in Honour of Henry Drisler*, p. 188.

fumis."<sup>11</sup> He argues therefore that *luteus* is a greenish yellow, showing also that in Ovid's other three uses of the word<sup>12</sup> the application would be scientifically accurate. Of Ovid this is perhaps true, as would also be suggested by such word combinations as: "(folia) colore in luteum languescente,"<sup>13</sup> "(cucumis) madescit luteus,"<sup>14</sup> "luteis ramulis,"<sup>15</sup> "luteola oliva,"<sup>16</sup> and "folia eius (dodecatheoni) exeunt a lutea radice."<sup>17</sup> Following Professor McCrea's interpretation we might also accurately describe<sup>18</sup> the color effects of the aurora by *luteus*. Pallor of countenance too, as everyone probably can attest from personal observation,<sup>19</sup> properly comes under the same designation. But in uncritical passages such as those extant in Latin literature, it seems unlikely that the greenish tint would be emphasized in referring to parchment, the yolk of egg, flowers and flower stamens,<sup>20</sup> though any one of these is capable of great variation of color. It is the brilliant yellow of the marigold<sup>21</sup> which Vergil wishes to impress upon the mind of his reader and not the greenish hue of a rare variety.

But primitive man was notoriously awkward and unobserving in devising terms for color, and the ancient Romans themselves without doubt confused the two words, and in many passages are found actually to have identified them. Isidore<sup>22</sup> says: "luteus color rubicundus, quod est croceus. Nam croceum lutei coloris est, ut (Verg. *Ecl.* 4. 44): 'croceo mutavit

<sup>11</sup> *Met.* 15.351. H. Blümner, *Die Farbenbezeichnungen bei den römischen Dichtern, Berliner Studien*, vol. XIII, p. 128, maintains that in this case the word "bedeutet einfach gelb."

<sup>12</sup> *Met.* 7.703; 13.579 f.; *Fast.* 4.714.

<sup>13</sup> *Plin. N. H.* 27.133.

<sup>14</sup> *Colum.* 10.398.

<sup>15</sup> *Plin. N. H.* 27.55.

<sup>16</sup> *Colum.* 12.49.9.

<sup>17</sup> *Plin. N. H.* 25.28.

<sup>18</sup> O. Rood, *Modern Chromatics*, p. 245.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Macbeth* 1.7: 37-8: "And wakes it now, to look so pale and green,  
At what it did so freely?"

<sup>20</sup> *Plin. N. H.* 21.14.

<sup>21</sup> Verg. *Ecl.* 2.50.

<sup>22</sup> *Orig.* 19.28.8. Cf. Serv. ad Verg. *Ecl.* 4.44: "luto colore rubicundo. Et est hypallage pro 'croco luteo,' nam crocum lutei coloris est." Non. p. 549 M: "Luteus color proprie crocinus est." Isid. *Orig.* 18.41.2: "luteos, id est croceos." Claud. 10.211.

vellera luto.'” Gellius<sup>23</sup> classes *luteus* as “rufus color,” associating it with *rubidus*, *rutilus*, and *poeniceus*, but perhaps no more credence can be given to this classification than to his accompanying etymology: “luteus contra rufus color est dilutior; inde ei nomen quoque esse factum videtur.” It is strange that Latin writers persistently class *luteus* with the shades of red when no passage of literature, with one possible exception,<sup>24</sup> forces us to interpret the word thus. But it is constantly difficult for us to draw the line between the shades of red and those of yellow, and *luteus* and *croceus*, like our *scarlet*, may denote shades tinged either with yellow or with orange.

On the other hand, Gellius<sup>25</sup> speaks of *croceus* as “rufus color,” associating it at the same time with *igneus*, *flammeus*, *sanguineus*, *ostrinus*, and *aureus*. There is probably more reason for considering *croceus* as being of a reddish hue<sup>26</sup> than *luteus*, because of several passages in which the former is used of blood.<sup>27</sup> The sunset,<sup>28</sup> and the rainbow,<sup>29</sup> of which the most noticeable hues are perhaps those of red, are also called *croceus*. A number of other word combinations would further suggest the reddish color.<sup>30</sup> Except in these few passages the usage of the word does not seem to differ from that of *luteus*, and so we may conclude that the norm of each color scale is a pure yellow, tending to shade, in the case of *luteus*, toward green, in the case of *croceus*, toward red.

Little need be said of *flavus*, since it is of less distinctive importance to our study and shows fewer variations in hue. Its general standards in nature are the waters and sands of the Tiber,<sup>31</sup> the arena,<sup>32</sup> the shore,<sup>33</sup> and especially the golden

<sup>23</sup> 2.26.8, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Nemes. *Cyn.* 319: “rubescere luto.”

<sup>25</sup> 2.26.5.

<sup>26</sup> Price, *op. cit.* p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Chiron 169: “cuicumque sanguilentus umor per nares profluet et croceus.” Perhaps also Cypr. Gall. *Lev.* 112; Veg. *Mulom.* 1.3; Potam. *Tract.* 2 p. 1416<sup>a</sup>; Lucr. 6.1188.

<sup>28</sup> Prud. *c. Symm.* 2 *praef.* 4; Cypr. Gall. *Exod.* 615.

<sup>29</sup> Cypr. Gall. *Gen.* 333; Verg. *Aen.* 4.700.

<sup>30</sup> Cypr. Gall. *Ios.* 407: “unde rubet croceum venientis flamma diei.” Prud. *c. Symm.* 2 *praef.* 4: “vesper croceus rubet.” Ambr. *in Psalm.* 118, *serm.* 17.29: “rubit croceo colore.” Plin. *N. H.* 31.90: “crocei coloris aut rufi.” Ov. *Fast.* 5.318.

<sup>31</sup> Ov. *Met.* 14.448; *Trist.* 5.1.31.

<sup>32</sup> Ov. *Ibis* 47.

<sup>33</sup> Ov. *Met.* 15.722.

yellow hair<sup>34</sup> which the Romans valued so highly. Schmidt<sup>35</sup> describes *flavus* as "nur gelb oder blond." It is used especially of Ceres<sup>36</sup> and seems to have become a fixed poetic epithet descriptive of the ripened grain.

#### YELLOW IN THE FLAMMEUM

No mention has as yet been made here of these words as used in certain connections which would be of no consequence in determining their color denotation, but which nevertheless are of great importance to the study of Roman life and thought.

The most important use of yellow in Roman ritual was in the bridal veil, the *flammeum*, "quo se cooperiunt mulieres die nuptiarum."<sup>37</sup> I speak of it as "yellow" in spite of a number of German critics, notably Samter,<sup>38</sup> who mention it as being "von roter Farbe." The bridal veil was, however, *luteus*,<sup>39</sup> and *luteus*, as has been shown, can scarcely be considered red.<sup>40</sup> So important were the rite and the color of the veil, that there were dyers at Rome who devoted themselves wholly to the coloring of marriage veils, "flammeari, infectores flammei coloris," says Festus.<sup>41</sup> The custom of veiling the bride seems never to have been departed from; the very expressions: "mulier nubit,"<sup>42</sup> "flammea sumit,"<sup>43</sup> were in themselves indicative of

<sup>34</sup> Sen. *Oed.* 420; Hor. *Carm.* 4.4.4; Verg. *Aen.* 4.590; Gell. 2.26.12-13.

<sup>35</sup> J. H. H. Schmidt, *Handbuch der lateinischen und griechischen Synonymik*, p. 218.

<sup>36</sup> Lucan. 4.412; Tib. 1.1.15; Verg. *Georg.* 1.96; Ov. *Am.* 3.10.3, 43; *Met.* 6.118; *Fast.* 4.424.

<sup>37</sup> Schol. ad Juv. 6.225.

<sup>38</sup> Ernst Samter, *Familienfeste*, pp. 47 ff.

<sup>39</sup> Claud. 10.211; Plin. *N. H.* 21.46; Lucan. 2.361. A. Rich (*Wörterbuch der röm. Alt.*, s. v. *flammeum*) says: "Es (the veil) war von tiefer und glänzender gelbe Farbe, wie eine Flamme, daher sein Name."

<sup>40</sup> Blümner, *op. cit.*, p. 126, n. 1: "blutrot war die Farbe des Flammeums auf keinen Fall." A. Walde, *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s. v. *lutum*, translates *luteus* as "goldgelb." Schol. ad Juv. 6.225, calls it "sang-uneum."

<sup>41</sup> Festus p. 89 M.

<sup>42</sup> *Orthographia Capri*, *Gram. Lat.* VII, p. 103.14-15, Keil. Cf. Martial's use of *nubere*: 5.17.4; 4.13.1; 6.45.3; and many other instances.

<sup>43</sup> Juv. 2.124 (here in derision for effeminacy); Stat. *Theb.* 2.341. Cf. also Apul. *Apol.* 76: "flammeo absoleto"; Juv. 6.225: "flammea conterit"; and Schol. on this line.

the marriage ceremony. The practice was by no means confined to Rome,<sup>44</sup> but of the significance and universality of the custom there is no need to speak, though several interesting conjectures might be noted.<sup>45</sup>

The Romans themselves had their own ideas as to the reason for the use of the *flammeum*. It was worn, says Festus,<sup>46</sup> "omnis boni causa," and was the symbol of the stability of human marriage,<sup>47</sup> "quod eo assidue utebatur flaminica . . . cui non licebat facere divortium." Rossbach<sup>48</sup> explains the use of the veil, in each case, in connection with the sacrifice which was offered by the matron at the household hearth, by the Flaminica at the altar of Juppiter Dialis, and by the bride at the hearth of her new husband. Diels<sup>49</sup> also connects it with the idea of the sacrifice and considers the putting on of the *flammeum* an expiatory rite: "das purpurne oder rote Gewandstück ahmt die Farbe des Blutes nach"; while Samter<sup>50</sup> thinks it a substitute for blood offerings. In these cases there is a misconception of the color used. The simple veiling could not have been considered necessary in connection with the sacrifice alone, because veiling was common among people who made no such sacrifice.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the sacrifice was not an inseparable part of the Roman marriage ceremony.

On the other hand, the supposition that it was the custom for the matron to wear the veil rests upon a single statement of Nonius:<sup>52</sup> "flammeum, vestis vel tegmen quo capita matronae

<sup>44</sup> Samter, *op. cit.* p. 48; L. Schroeder, *Die Hochzeitsbrauche der Esten*, p. 72 ff.; *Genesis* XXIV, 65.

<sup>45</sup> F. C. Conybeare, *Myth, Magic and Morals*, pp. 232 f.: "The idea that spirits, especially evil ones, approach women through the ears . . . was an old Rabbinic one, found in the Talmud, in Philo, Josephus, and above all in Paul . . . (I Cor. XI). . . . Tertullian . . . explains that evil angels were ever lurking about, ready to assail even married women . . . through their ears. From this point of view he penned: *De Virginibus Velandis*," and the church is still careful to veil the nuns and to require a hat to be worn in church. E. J. Wood, *The Wedding Day in All Ages and Countries*, p. 18, states that among the Jews it was the sign of subjection to the husband.

<sup>46</sup> Fest. p. 89 M.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Frédéric Portal, *Des couleurs symboliques*, p. 242.

<sup>48</sup> A. W. Rossbach, *Untersuchungen über die römische Ehe*, pp. 284 f.

<sup>49</sup> Hermann Diels, *Sibyllinische Blätter*, p. 70. See also note 129.

<sup>50</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 53.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 52.

<sup>52</sup> Non. p. 541 M.

tegunt." In reference to this, Ellis, in his edition of Catullus,<sup>53</sup> admits that the marriage *flammeum* may not have been identical with that of the *matronae*, while Samter<sup>54</sup> goes even farther and more rightly considers that the passage "steht nicht in Einklang mit den sonstigen Nachrichten; vermutlich liegt nur ein Missverständnis oder ein undeutlicher Ausdruck des Compilators vor." At least the passage does not necessarily mean that the matron wore the *flammeum* continuously, and it may be merely a careless statement of the well known marriage custom.

Enveloping the head<sup>55</sup> and covering the hair,<sup>56</sup> the *flammeum* veiled the downcast face of the bride.<sup>57</sup> It must not be associated with the veil worn by the bride of today, for it was not an accessory part of the bridal costume, but a robe in itself which covered the whole figure from head to foot.<sup>58</sup> It was by far the most important and noticeable portion of the wedding attire by reason of its size and color, as may well be realized by a glance at the illustrations,<sup>59</sup> particularly the Aldobrandini marriage picture.<sup>60</sup> In this, the use of yellow is especially emphasized, since the headdress of the bridegroom, the shoes of the bride, the mattress and the counterpane of the bed, the footstool, and the towel are all of that color. We have, however, no ancient literary authority for such extensive use of yellow by the bride and groom, though there is mention of a network cap,<sup>61</sup> "reticulum luteum," worn by the bride, "ominis causa."<sup>62</sup> On the ancient marriage veil, exclusive of the Roman,

<sup>53</sup> 61.8, note.

<sup>54</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 47, n. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Petron. 26.1: "caput involverat flammeo."

<sup>56</sup> Claud. 10.285.

<sup>57</sup> Mart. 12.42.3; Lucan. 2.361; *Orthographia Capri, Gram. Lat.* VII, p. 103.14-15, Keil.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. E. T. Merrill's note on Cat. 61.8; Rich, *op. cit.* discussion and plate under *flammeum*; H. B. Walters, *A Classical Dictionary*, discussion under *flammeum*.

<sup>59</sup> Th. Schreiber, *Atlas of Classical Antiquities*, pl. 81.

<sup>60</sup> C. A. Böttiger, *Aldobrandinische Hochzeit*, pp. 192 ff. See for illustration: H. B. Walters, *The Art of the Romans*, pl. 40. Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 4.585.

<sup>61</sup> Fest. p. 286 M.

<sup>62</sup> Samter (*op. cit.* p. 48) says that the use of the *flammeum* or its equivalent was not exclusively a Roman custom, but errs in citing as parallels instances of red or purple in the marriage ritual of other peoples.



there is no direct evidence, though Wachsmuth<sup>63</sup> believes that the ancient Greek veil was of reddish hue. But a true parallel may be found in the modern Greek custom in accordance with which the bride wears a flame-colored, gold-fringed veil.<sup>64</sup>

#### YELLOW AS THE COLOR OF THE BRIDE'S SHOES, ETC.

The shoes also of the bride were yellow. Hymen, the god of love and marriage, is pictured<sup>65</sup> wearing the "luteus soccus." Now the use of the *soccus* was in general confined to women<sup>66</sup> and comic actors. Since Hymen can have no connection with comic actors, we must consequently interpret his use of the *soccus* as indicative of the marriage ceremony, and as assigned to him in his role of the bride.<sup>66<sup>b</sup></sup> Again we have, with reference to the bride, the expressions "fulgentem plantam"<sup>67</sup> and "aureolos pedes,"<sup>68</sup> both doubtless containing the same idea of color. But in Seneca<sup>69</sup> we find the line: "luteo plantas cohibente socco," with reference to the wife of Hercules, and with apparently no idea of the marriage custom.<sup>70</sup> The use of the color yellow was confined almost entirely to women, says Pliny,<sup>71</sup> and since other garments of the color were commonly worn by them at all times, it is not improbable that yellow shoes also were common articles of dress, and such a connection may serve only to convince us of the truth of Pliny's statement. Cupid, dressed in a yellow tunic, flits hither and thither about the head of Catullus' sweetheart, Lesbia.<sup>72</sup> Among the gifts presented to a bride we read of a veil embroidered with the yellow

<sup>63</sup> Curt Wachsmuth, *Das alte Griechenland im neuen*, p. 90, n. 43, quoted by Samter, *op. cit.* p. 48. The opinion is based on Achill. Tat. 2.11.

<sup>64</sup> Reinsberg-Duringfeld, *Hochzeitsbuch*, p. 59, quoted by Samter, *op. cit.* p. 48.

<sup>65</sup> Cat. 61.5-10. Cf. Ov. *Met.* 10.1 f.: "croceo velatus amictu . . . digreditur . . . Hymenaeus." *Epist.* 21.162: "(Hymenaeus) . . . trahitur multo splendida palla croco."

<sup>66</sup> Suet. *Cal.* 52: "soccus muliebris."

<sup>66<sup>a</sup></sup> See Ellis' note on Cat. 61.10.

<sup>67</sup> Cat. 68.71.

<sup>68</sup> Cat. 61.167.

<sup>69</sup> *Phaed.* 322.

<sup>70</sup> Blümner, *op. cit.* p. 125.

<sup>71</sup> Plin. *N. H.* 21.46: "lutei video honorem antiquissimum in nuptialibus flammis totum feminis concessum."

<sup>72</sup> Cat. 68.133-4.

acanthus.<sup>73</sup> The very bonds of wedlock, probably as sacred to the Romans as to us, in spite of the satirists, were yellow (*flava . . . vincula*).<sup>74</sup>

#### FIRE AS A SYMBOL OF LIFE

What the omen<sup>74a</sup> was which the Roman mind associated with these marriage customs may possibly best be determined by a study of the other rites indispensable to the occasion.

The *deductio*, commemorating, says Pliny,<sup>75</sup> the rape of the Sabines, was essential to the validity of the marriage, and hence was never omitted when the parties were of any social standing whatever. The part of the *deductio* which assumes foremost place in the consciousness of the Roman poets was apparently the use of torches,<sup>76</sup> the *felices taedae*,<sup>77</sup> which was also considered an omen.<sup>78</sup> These were carried not only by the *patrimus* or *matrimus* who bore the wedding torch (*spina alba*),<sup>79</sup> but also by the procession of guests.<sup>80</sup> In ancient Greece, too, we find the use of torches common, since the mother of the bride accompanied her daughter, torch in hand, to her new home, where she was welcomed by the mother of the bridegroom, also carrying a torch.<sup>81</sup> In modern Greece the bride and groom themselves carry torches,<sup>82</sup> and many other examples might be noted.<sup>83</sup> They were necessary, says Festus,<sup>84</sup> "quia noctu nubebant," and Servius<sup>85</sup> likewise states: "Varro . . . dicit sponsas ideo faces praeire, quod antea non nisi per noctem

<sup>73</sup> Auson. 355.4; cf. Verg. *Aen.* 1.649 ff., 1.711.

<sup>74</sup> Tib. 2.2.18.

<sup>74a</sup> See notes 46 and 61.

<sup>75</sup> *N. H.* 16.75.

<sup>76</sup> Mart. 3.93.26; 4.13.2; 12.42.3; Cat. 61.15; Claud. 10.202; Prop. 3.16.16; Ov. *Epist.* 11.101; Stat. *Silv.* 1.2.5; and many others.

<sup>77</sup> Cat. 64.25.

<sup>78</sup> Prop. 4.3.13; Plin. *N. H.* 16.75.

<sup>79</sup> Fest. p. 245 M; Varro ap. Non. p. 112 M.

<sup>80</sup> Fest. p. 288 M: "rapi solet fax . . . ab utrisque amicis." The word usually occurs in the plural.

<sup>81</sup> Schol. Eurip. *Troad.* 315; Eurip. *Iph. Aul.* 732 ff.; *Phoen.* 344 ff.; *Medea* 1024 ff.; Schol. Apoll. *Arg.* 4.808.

<sup>82</sup> Wachsmuth, *op. cit.* p. 93.

<sup>83</sup> Ernst Samter, *Geburt, Hochzeit und Tod*, p. 75.

<sup>84</sup> Fest. p. 245 M.

<sup>85</sup> Ad Verg. *Ecl.* 8.29.

nubentes ducebantur a sponsis." Catullus opens his marriage poem<sup>86</sup> with the words: "Vesper adest, iuvenes, consurgite," and later in the same poem<sup>87</sup> states: "nec iunxere priusquam se tuus extulit ardor (Hespere)." But we must bear in mind that because of the variation in the time of the rising of the evening star the "felix hora" was not inevitably after dark. Therefore we need not agree entirely with Festus' and Servius' explanation and may perhaps connect<sup>88</sup> the use of torches with another important use of fire in the wedding ceremony, namely the acceptance by the bride of fire and water from her husband, who met her in the *atrium*<sup>89</sup> of her new home after the *deductio*. So essential was this formality that, like expressions with *nubere*, "aqua et igni accipi"<sup>90</sup> was indicative of the marriage rite when used of a woman. This use of fire and water is variously explained, but seems generally to be thought of as indicative of the life which the couple were to live together<sup>91</sup> and of the woman's part in the home. Yet a deeper meaning may be discerned even in the Roman authors themselves, who find in the use of these two elements so essential to existence, an underlying religious idea, which played a prominent part in the family life of the great Empire.

The Romans conceived of the soul after death as "hovering around the place of burial and requiring for its peace and happiness that offerings of food and drink should be made to it regularly. Should these offerings be discontinued, the soul would cease to be happy itself, and might become perhaps a spirit of evil. The maintenance of these rites and ceremonies devolved naturally upon the descendants from generation to generation, whom the spirits in turn would guide and guard. The Roman was bound, therefore, to perform these acts of affection and piety so long as he lived himself, and bound no less to provide for their performance after his death by perpetuating his race,

<sup>86</sup> 62.1.

<sup>87</sup> 62.29.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Samter, *G. H. und T.*, p. 72.

<sup>89</sup> Varro *L. L.* 5.61 says: "in limine."

<sup>90</sup> Scaev. *Dig.* 24.1.66: "priusquam (virgo) aqua et igni acciperetur, id est nuptiae celebrarentur." Serv. ad Verg. *Aen.* 4.167: "aqua et igni mariti uxores accipiebant."

<sup>91</sup> Fest. p. 87 M: "ut ignem atque aquam cum viro communicaret." Cf. Joachim Marquardt, *Das Privatleben der Römer*, I, p. 56.

and the family cult. A curse was believed to rest upon the childless man" . . . who "had to face the prospect of the extinction of his family, and his own descent to the grave with no posterity to make him blessed."<sup>92</sup> Therefore it is not strange that we find in the marriage ritual a representation of the idea of productivity in the form of the "duo . . . validissima vitae humanae elementa ignis et aqua."<sup>93</sup>

Numa consecrated perpetual fire,<sup>94</sup> the greatest of elements,<sup>95</sup> as first of all things, and fires of some kind were preserved in all the principal temples of the known world.<sup>96</sup> Light was the sign of being and life;<sup>97</sup> it was from the *vitalis calor*<sup>98</sup> that life originated: "vapor humidus omnes res creat."<sup>99</sup> All living creatures, man as well as animals, were produced from the two discordant<sup>100</sup> elements, fire and water;<sup>101</sup> the soul itself was a commixture of the two.<sup>102</sup> Fire and water were differentiated in this connection, fire being considered the masculine, and water the feminine element of creation.<sup>103</sup>

The same idea of fire as the symbol of life is expressed in Artemidorus,<sup>104</sup> when he says that a bright light foretold to

<sup>92</sup> H. W. Johnston, *The Private Life of the Romans*, pp. 29 ff. Cf. W. W. Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, pp. 307 ff.; Liv. *Epit.* 59; Gell. 1.6.8; Cic. *Leg.* 3.7.

<sup>93</sup> Isid. *Orig.* 13.12.2. Cf. Ov. *Met.* 1.431: "ab his oriuntur cuncta duobus (humore caloreque)." Ov. *Fast.* 4.791 f., "quod in his (igni et unda) vitae causa est, haec perdidit exul, his nova fit coniunx." Serv. ad Verg. *Aen.* 4.103: "aqua et igni adhibitis; duobus maximis elementis, natura coniuncta habeatur."

<sup>94</sup> Plut. *Numa* 11.

<sup>95</sup> Plin. *N. H.* 2.10: "Nec de elementis video dubitari, quattuor esse ea: ignium summum."

<sup>96</sup> R. P. Knight, *Symbolic Language of Ancient Art and Mythology*, p. 26.

<sup>97</sup> Plut. *Q. R.* 2.

<sup>98</sup> Cic. *N. D.* 2.24: "caloris natura vim habet in se vitalem." Cf. Isid. *Orig.* 11.1.16; Curt. 3.5.3; 7.3.15; 8.4.8.

<sup>99</sup> Ov. *Met.* 1.432 f. Cf. also Isid. *Orig.* 19.6.2: "nihil est enim pene quod igne non efficiatur." Plin. *N. H.* 36.200-1: "nihil paene non igni perfici . . . Imensa, improba rerum naturae portio, et in qua dubium sit, plura absumat an pariat." Varro *L. L.* 5.61: "igitur duplex causa nascendi ignis et aqua." Plin. *N. H.* 28.80: "ne igne quidem vincitur, quo cuncta." Plin. *N. H.* 2.239, speaks of fire as "fecunda."

<sup>100</sup> Ov. *Met.* 1.432, says "pugnax," *Fast.* 4.787: "contraria semina."

<sup>101</sup> Hippoc. *Diaeta* 1.4.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 1.8.

<sup>103</sup> Varro *L. L.* 5.61; Plut. *Q. R.* 1.

<sup>104</sup> *On.* 2.9.

a sick person his recovery, a dim one his death. It was by boiling that Medea professed to give back youth to the aged,<sup>105</sup> and Pelops, after being served as a banquet by Tantalus, was boiled by the gods and made alive and young again.<sup>106</sup> The creative powers of fire are invoked by the Hindus by means of fire sticks, the use of which is thought to produce male offspring.<sup>107</sup> Travelers to the Kei Islands in the East Indies relate that when the natives are away on a voyage, friends keep a sacred fire in their absence, watching it carefully day and night, because its extinction would be an evil omen, since it is a symbol of the life of the absent ones.<sup>108</sup> In like manner the life of Meleager was bound up with a brand plucked from the fire on the hearth, and when his mother in a fit of rage at her son destroyed the brand, he died a death of terrible agony.<sup>109</sup>

The comforting and reviving powers of the sun,<sup>110</sup> of fire, and of the heat produced from both, must have been among the first ideas to be grasped by the savage mind. These were among the principal sources of their comfort and of their agricultural success. Now, inasmuch as the earth is usually spiritualized as feminine,<sup>111</sup> and since the fertility of women and the productive power of the earth were closely associated in the primitive mind,<sup>112</sup> we have an extension of this idea in the common belief, found in the legends of all races, that women might be impregnated by the sun or even by the moon.<sup>113</sup> At Hindu marriages<sup>114</sup> in ancient times, and in Iran and Central Asia today,<sup>115</sup> the bride is made to expose herself to the sun's

<sup>105</sup> Schol. Aristoph. *Eq.* 1321; Hygin. *Fab.* 24; Paus. 8.11.2. Fire was not the sole life-giving element in this case, since herbs also were used by Medea.

<sup>106</sup> Pindar *Olymp.* 1.40 ff. with Schol.

<sup>107</sup> *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda (Sacred Books of the East, vol. XLII)*, trans. by M. Bloomfield, p. 97 ff.; 460.

<sup>108</sup> Le P. H. Geurtjens, *Le cérémonial des voyages aux Iles Keij*, (*Anthropos* V, 1910, p. 337 ff.)

<sup>109</sup> Aesch. *Choeph.* 604 ff.; Diod. Sic. 4.34.6-7; Ov. *Met.* 8.445 ff.; Hygin. *Fab.* 171, 174.

<sup>110</sup> Adelaide S. Hall, *Important Symbols*, p. 6, classifies the sun as the symbol of the active power of nature. Cf. Ernest Crawley, *Mystic Rose*, p. 197.

<sup>111</sup> E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, II, 245.

<sup>112</sup> Fowler, *op. cit.* p. 104.

<sup>113</sup> Hans Egede, *A Description of Greenland*, p. 209.

<sup>114</sup> Monier Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India*, p. 354.

<sup>115</sup> H. Vambery, *Das Türkenvolk*, p. 112.

rays. In a modern Greek tale the Sun bestowed a daughter upon a childless woman,<sup>116</sup> and a Sicilian legend tells of a young princess who conceived a child by the Sun.<sup>117</sup> The old Greek story of Danaë,<sup>118</sup> imprisoned by her father in punishment for her disobedience, and impregnated by Zeus, who came to her in a shower of gold (probably standing for sunshine), perhaps belongs to the same class of tales.

Vesta, the personification of fire,<sup>119</sup> is identified with the earth,<sup>120</sup> probably in its productive aspect. Rain when accompanied by lightning was thought by the Greeks to be more nutritive and prolific,<sup>121</sup> and it was probably with some such idea as this that the Arcadians sacrificed to thunder, lightning and the tempest.<sup>122</sup> Krishna, in an old Hindu poem, says: "I am the thunderbolt; I am the fire residing in the bodies of all things which have life."<sup>123</sup> Vulcan himself, the personification of fire, may originally, thinks Preller,<sup>124</sup> have been thought of as a beneficent nature spirit, perhaps the warm fertilizing power of the earth. Closely connected with the cult of Vulcan was the cult of Bona Dea (Maia), that rather mysterious goddess; for it was the Flamen Vulcanalis who sacrificed to her on May 1, and she is addressed in invocations as Maia Volcani.<sup>125</sup> Now Bona Dea seems certainly to have been a protective deity of the female sex, the Earth-mother, a goddess of fertility.<sup>126</sup> Men were excluded from her rites,<sup>127</sup> which

<sup>116</sup> J. G. von Hahn, *Griechische und albanesische Märchen*, no. 41, vol. I, p. 245.

<sup>117</sup> Laura Gonzenbach, *Sicilianische Märchen*, no. 28, vol. I, pp. 177 ff.

<sup>118</sup> Soph. *Antig.* 944 ff.; Apollod. *Bibliotheca* 2.4.1.

<sup>119</sup> Ov. *Fast.* 6.291: "Nec tu aliud Vestam quam vivam intellege flammam." August Preuner, *Hestia-Vesta*, p. 221, speaks of Vesta as the "Gottheit des Feuers, sofern religiöse, ethische Ideen sich in demselben abspiegeln, nicht des Feuers als blossen Elements." Cf. C. Schwenk, *Die Sinnbilder der alten Völker*, p. 117.

<sup>120</sup> Ov. *Fast.* 6.267: "Vesta eadem est quae Terra. Subest vigil ignis utrique." Cf. August. *Civ.* 7.16.

<sup>121</sup> Plut. *Symp.* 4.2.1.

<sup>122</sup> Paus. 8.29.2.

<sup>123</sup> *Bhagavat-Gita* X.

<sup>124</sup> L. Preller, *Römische Mythologie*, II, p. 149.

<sup>125</sup> Gell. 13.23.2.

<sup>126</sup> Fowler, *op. cit.* p. 71, 104, 106. Cf. Macr. *Sat.* 1.12.21: "Auctor est Cornelius Labeo huic Maiae, id est terrae, aedem Kalendis Maiis dedicatam sub nomine Bonae Deae."

<sup>127</sup> Cic. *Dom.* 105; *Har. Resp.* 8, 37, 38; Ov. *Ars* 3.637; Tib. 1.6.24; Plut. *Caes.* 9; *Q. R.* 20.

were conducted by the Vestals.<sup>128</sup> The significance of the presence of these priestesses of fire is not to be overlooked, since all their public services were rendered at festivals relating to fruitfulness.<sup>129</sup>

#### YELLOW AS THE CHROMATIC SYMBOL OF FIRE AND OF LIFE

In view of all these facts, and of the natural association of ideas to which they lead, it is not illogical to suppose that originally these concepts pertaining to the color yellow, to fire, and ultimately, perhaps, to the sun, were connected in the primitive Roman mind, although the Romans of later times may not have realized it. It is true that statements in literature which make any connection between yellow and fire are decidedly few, although Isidore<sup>130</sup> concisely states that the use of yellow on race horses was symbolic of the patronage of fire and of the Sun. It was also with reins of yellow that the sun-god guided his horses on their daily journey through the heavens,<sup>131</sup> and Vulcan, the personification of fire, is called *luteus*.<sup>132</sup> In China today one of the oldest divinities, the "Herdfürst" or "Kükengott," called also, says Nagel, "Wang-ti, der gelbe Kaiser," is represented by the use of paper striped with red and yellow.<sup>133</sup>

The Flaminica Dialis, as we have seen, wore the yellow *flammeum*.<sup>134</sup> To her and her husband, it is thought, may have been assigned in early times the duty of kindling and caring for the sacred fire.<sup>135</sup> At least there can be no doubt of the

<sup>128</sup> Plut. *Cic.* 19-20; Dio, 37.45.

<sup>129</sup> Fowler, *op. cit.* p. 71; Smith's *Dict. s. v. Vestales*. Hans Dragendorff, *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, LI, p. 294, considers that the dress of the Vestals was originally identical with that of the bride.

<sup>130</sup> *Orig.* 18.41.2: "luteos, id est croceos, igni et soli . . . sacra verunt." Cf. M. H. de Charencey, *Symbolique romain*, p. 8.

<sup>131</sup> Claud. 22.471: "(Sol) . . . lutea lora iubasque Subligat alipedum."

<sup>132</sup> Juv. 10.132. In Maeterlinck's *Bluebird* the spirit of fire is clothed in red and yellow. The robin, on account of its color, was sacred to Thor, the god of lightning (J. A. Farrer, *Primitive Manners and Customs*, p. 293).

<sup>133</sup> A. Nagel, *Arch. Rel.* XI, 1908, p. 24, 30. Cf. A. Hall's classification of yellow, *Important Symbols*, pp. 11 f.; and that of Charencey, *op. cit.* p. 11.

<sup>134</sup> Fest. p. 92 M: "flammeo vestimento flaminica utebatur, id ets Dialis uxor et Iovis sacerdos, cui telum fulminis eodem erat colore." Cf. Fest. p. 89 M.

<sup>135</sup> J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough, Magic Art*, II, p. 246.

sanctity of the fire which was kept by the Flamen, as is proved by the rule that it might not be taken from his house except for the purpose of sacrifice.<sup>136</sup> The regulation that he could not be absent from his home even for a single night<sup>137</sup> also emphasizes the importance ascribed to the discharge of his duties. That the rules of life imposed upon the Flamen Dialis were very similar to those observed by the Brahmans, the fire priests of India,<sup>138</sup> might furnish additional evidence for the idea that the original function of the Flamen and his wife was the care of the sacred fire, and this parallelism is the more striking if, as some scholars hold, the names Brahman and Flamen are philologically identical.<sup>139</sup>

In one instance at least, the ancients seem to have concisely connected in thought not only fire, but also yellow and the idea of life; for the possession of the golden-yellow hair (*flava coma*), so characteristic of divinities and heroes,<sup>140</sup> was thought to confer long life and strength. Poseidon made Pterelaus immortal by bestowing upon him a golden hair upon which his life was dependent.<sup>141</sup> In modern Greek folklore the strength and very life of a man are contingent upon the preservation of three golden hairs upon his head, and when these are pulled out he grows weak and is open to the attacks of his enemies, at whose hands he finally meets death.<sup>142</sup> In the Hymns of the Atharva-Veda the goddess of misfortune is euphemistically addressed as "golden-locked," and the goddess of grudge and avarice as "gold-complexioned, lovely one, who rests on golden cushions . . . who wears golden robes."<sup>143</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Gell. 10.15.7: "Ignem e flaminia, id est flaminis Dialis domo, nisi sacrum efferri ius non est." Cf. Fest. 106 M.

<sup>137</sup> Liv. 5.52.13 f. Gell. 10.15.14 says: "de eo lecto trinoctium continuum non decubat"; and Tac. *Ann.* 3.71.3: "plus quam binoctium abeset."

<sup>138</sup> Frazer, *l. c.*

<sup>139</sup> P. Kretschmer, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der griechischen Sprache*, pp. 127 f.; O. Schrader, *Reallexikon der indogermanischen Altertumskunde*, pp. 637 f. Th. Mommsen, *Hist.* (New York 1900) I, p. 215, and Fowler, *op. cit.* p. 147, derive *flamen* from *flare*, while Walde, *op. cit.* s. v. *flamen*, derives it from a different form, \**fladmen* or \**fladsmen*.

<sup>140</sup> See K. F. Smith on *Tibullus*, 1.1.15 and W. P. Mustard's *Sannazaro*, p. 78, n. 84, for instances.

<sup>141</sup> Apollod. *Bibliotheca*, 2.4.5, 7.

<sup>142</sup> J. G. von Hahn, *op. cit.* I, p. 217; II, p. 282.

<sup>143</sup> *SBE.*, vol. XLII, p. 173.



## THE TORCH AS A SYMBOL OF LIFE

If, as seems to have been the case, yellow is to be connected with fire, and fire was the symbol of life, let us return to the marriage ceremony and see if the same thought is connected with the use of the nuptial torch. It was a common belief, says Servius, that whoever carried a marriage torch was destined to long life.<sup>144</sup> "Hier," says Rossbach,<sup>145</sup> "wird offenbar die Hochzeitfackel als Lebensflamme gefasst." Festus tells us,<sup>146</sup> furthermore, that nuptial torches were carried in honor of Ceres. This is not a strange statement, in spite of Marquardt,<sup>147</sup> since Ceres represents in Roman religion the "generative power of nature,"<sup>148</sup> an idea, as we are beginning to see, perfectly in accord with the Roman concept of the marriage ceremony. Etymologically also the name Ceres contains the same notion, being probably connected, as Servius thought, with *creare*.<sup>149</sup>

In general, torches were the symbol not only of life, but of its termination.<sup>150</sup> The torch held erect, as at the wedding, symbolized the fullness of life, while reversed it indicated death.<sup>151</sup> It was perhaps from the appearance of this reversed torch in a vision that Polynices inferred his own approaching death.<sup>152</sup> The life of the Roman was, as it were, bounded by two torches; "vivimus insignes inter utramque facem," says Propertius.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Serv. ad Verg. *Ecl.* 8.29: "Corneae sane faces, quae quasi diutissimae luceant. Quas rapiunt tamquam vitae praesidia; namque his qui sunt diutius feruntur vixisse."

<sup>145</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 340.

<sup>146</sup> Fest. p. 87 M.

<sup>147</sup> *Op. cit.* I, p. 55, n. 7: "scheint nicht bekannt zu sein."

<sup>148</sup> Fowler, *op. cit.* p. 73. Cf. Rossbach, *op. cit.* p. 340, who considers that the "Lebensflamme . . . der Ceres heilig ist, die als agrarische Göttin das Leben erhält."

<sup>149</sup> Serv. ad Verg. *Georg.* 1.7: "Ceres a creando dicta." Cf. Fowler, *op. cit.* p. 73.

<sup>150</sup> Böttiger, *op. cit.* p. 142: "So wird die Fackel das doppelte Symbol des Lebens wie des Todes."

<sup>151</sup> Sil. 2.184: "Adfecit leto, taedaeque ad funera versae." Cf. Sil. 13.547; Ov. *Met.* 10.6-7.

<sup>152</sup> Stat. *Theb.* 11.142: "Coniugis Argeiae lacera cum lampade maestam Effigiem."

<sup>153</sup> 4.11.46. Cf. Ov. *Fast.* 2.561 f.: "Conde tuas, Hymenae, faces et ab ignibus atris Aufer! habent alias maesta sepulera faces." *Epist.* 21.172: "Et face pro thalami fax mihi mortis adest." Apul. *Flor.* 16. p. 66: "prius ad funebrem facem quam ad nuptialem venisse." Cf. Marquardt, *op. cit.* I, p. 55, n. 2.

This identification of life with the flame is found in the modern Greek custom of keeping the "unsleeping lamp" (τὸ ἀκοίμητο κωνδῆλι) burning, either in the room where death took place or at the grave, for a variable period of time. Only with the extinction of the flame comes, it is believed, unconsciousness of the world. A few couplets from a modern funeral dirge may well illustrate this:

"And when the priests with solemn song march toward  
the grave with me,  
Steal thou out from thy mother's side, and light me  
torches three;  
And when the priests shall quench again those lights  
for me,—ah then,  
Then, like the breath of roses, sweet, thou passest  
from my ken."<sup>154</sup>

We should like to believe, therefore, that the use of the marriage torch as a symbol of life at the wedding ceremony served to intensify the significance of the color yellow at the same ceremony.

#### YELLOW USED BY WOMEN

We have stated<sup>154b</sup> that yellow was a favorite color of dress among the women of Rome and was, in fact, as Pliny says, all but confined to women. This conclusion is based upon a study of certain articles of clothing to which the investigation of the color yellow must necessarily lead, and of which only a brief outline need be given. There were in use at Rome, and apparently also in Greece,<sup>155</sup> several garments which, to judge from their names alone, must certainly have been yellow. These were the *crocota*, the *crocotula*, the *epicrocum*,<sup>156</sup> and the *calthula*. All these take their names from yellow flowers which, no doubt, they imitated in their color.<sup>157</sup> Their use was, for the most

<sup>154</sup> Quoted from the version by A. T. G. Passow, *Popul. Carm.* no. 377A; see J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*, p. 508 ff. Cf. the use on the Haterii Relief of torches around the bed on which the body of the dead lies, Daremberg-Saglio, *Dict. s. v. funus*, fig. 3360.

<sup>154a</sup> See note 71.

<sup>155</sup> Creuzer, *op. cit.* IV, p. 596, n. 1. For illustrations see O. M. von Stackelberg, *Die Gräber der Hellenen*, pl. 44.2; 46.2.

<sup>156</sup> Fest. p. 82 M.

<sup>157</sup> Non. p. 548 M: "Caltulam et crocotulam, utrumque a generibus florum translatum, a caltha et croco." Vell. 2.82.4: "crocota velatus aurea." Another manuscript reading on this passage gives "corona." Non. p. 549 M: "Crocota, crocei coloris vestis."

part, confined to women,<sup>158</sup> and consequently men who wore them were considered foppish and were taunted with effeminacy<sup>159</sup> or with voluptuousness.<sup>160</sup> Thus we find the actor wearing the *crocota*,<sup>161</sup> whereby the ill repute in which he was proverbially held<sup>162</sup> was heightened. The preference of the Roman woman for yellow is seen in the wall paintings discovered at Herculaneum and Pompeii. In the famous mythological picture in the House of the Tragic Poet, Iphigenia, when about to be offered as a sacrifice to the goddess, is pictured in a yellow robe.<sup>163</sup> In another Pompeian wall painting, Medea, when meditating the murder of her children, is likewise dressed in that color.<sup>164</sup> This very extensive use of yellow in women's garments cannot have been without some reason and fundamental significance. We believe that it confirms the truth of our correlation of the ideas of yellow, fire and life.

#### FIRE AS A SYMBOL OF PURIFICATION

Another idea besides that of productivity attaches itself inseparably to the symbolic use of fire and its chromatic symbol yellow, and that is the conception of flame as an agent of purification.<sup>165</sup> This is no new notion in religion, and is especially

<sup>158</sup> Non. p. 538 M (Plaut. *Aul.* frag. 1): "pro illis crocotis, strophiiis, sumptu uxorio." *Ciris*, 251 f.: "puellam, Quae prius in tenui fuerat succineta crocota." Plaut. *Epid.* 231; Non. p. 548 M; Aristoph. *Lys.* 44 ff.; *Thesm.* 945 f.; *Ecl.* 878 f., 331; Pollux, 7.56 (ed. Bekker)

<sup>159</sup> Cic. *Harus. Resp.* 44: "P. Clodius a crocota . . . a muliebribus soleis purpureisque fasceolis . . . est factus repente popularis." Non. p. 318 M: "Varro de sermone latino lib. III: 'Utrumque mulieres, et epicrocum viri quoque habitarunt.'" Aristoph. *Thesm.* 137-8, 945, 253. The "vestis picta croco" of Verg. *Aen.* 9.614, is probably the crocota, used as a taunt for effeminacy.

<sup>160</sup> Varro *L. L.* 7.53.

<sup>161</sup> Apul. *Apol.* 13.

<sup>162</sup> Cic. *Arch.* 10; Nep. *Praef.* 5; Suet. *Tib.* 35.

<sup>163</sup> Creuzer, *op. cit.* IV, p. 596, n. 1; Walters, *Art of the Romans*, pl. 42; Wolfgang Helbig, *Wandgemälde*, §1304.

<sup>164</sup> G. F. Hill, *Illustrations of School Classics*, §156. Cf. Pierre Gusman, *Pompeii*, pl. 1.

<sup>165</sup> Serv. ad Verg. *Aen.* 6.741: "Unde etiam in sacris omnibus tres sunt istae purgationes: nam aut taeda purgant et sulphure, aut aqua abluunt." Cf. *Lev.* VI, 30: "And no sin offering . . . shall be eaten: it shall be burnt in the fire."

familiar to us because of the Jewish teachings in regard to it; but the same thought may be traced in almost all of the religious systems of the world, even to the present day. Possibly the origin of this idea of purity and cleansing power is to be found in the use of fire in burnt offerings and sacrifices. The fire was thought to destroy the material part of the sacrifices and by virtue of its own inherent purity to make them fit for the gods.<sup>166</sup> Pursuing this idea further, the ancients believed that in the same manner fire purged away the mortal parts of men, leaving only the immortal, and for this reason a death by fire came to be regarded and sought as a kind of apotheosis.<sup>167</sup> Hence goddesses tried to confer immortality upon mortals by burning them by night,<sup>168</sup> but their kind purposes generally failed of accomplishment because of the interference of some terrified mortal who was ignorant of the design of the heavenly visitor.

It was a custom, common in antiquity, annually to extinguish and renew the sacred fire kept, in the case of the Romans, in the temple of Vesta, and renewed yearly on March 1.<sup>169</sup> Each year the Greeks imported fresh fire from Delos to Lemnos,<sup>170</sup> and similar practices are found among the South American Indians,<sup>171</sup> and among the Japanese.<sup>172</sup> In all these cases there is the idea of the beginning of a new and purified life with the new and pure flame. This purificatory purpose of the flame seems to have been well understood by the Romans, as is shown by its use particularly in the festivals of the yearly calendar.

The instruments of purification (*februa casta*),<sup>173</sup> that is, the blood of the October horse mixed with the ashes of the unborn calves burnt at the Fordicidia (April 15), were kept in the *Penus Vestae*. "Vesta dabit. Vestae munere purus eris," says Ovid.<sup>174</sup> At the Parilia (April 21) these were sprinkled over a

<sup>166</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, V, 12.

<sup>167</sup> Lucian, *De Morte Peregrini*, 25 ff.; Diog. Laer. 8.2.69 ff.

<sup>168</sup> Plut. *Isis et Osiris*, 16; Ov. *Fast.* 4.547 ff.; Homer, *Hymn to Demeter*, 231 ff.; Apollod. *Bibliotheca*, 1.5.1; Apoll. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.865 ff.

<sup>169</sup> Macr. *Sat.* 1.12.6; Ov. *Fast.* 3.135 ff.

<sup>170</sup> Philostratus, *Heroica*, 19.14 (ed. Kayser).

<sup>171</sup> C. C. Jones, *Antiquities of the Southern Indians*, p. 21.

<sup>172</sup> S. Reinach, *Orpheus*, p. 223.

<sup>173</sup> Ov. *Fast.* 2.19-46.

<sup>174</sup> *Fast.* 4.732.

bonfire. The people leaped over the flames and drove their flocks through them,<sup>175</sup> a rite in which Ovid himself took part.<sup>176</sup> The object of the whole ceremony was obviously purification,<sup>177</sup> and we find that the Vestals very appropriately played an important part; for, as we have noted, they had in their keeping the *februa casta*, the holy instruments of purification.

It is perhaps an analogous practice to that of passing through the fire for the purpose of purification which is so bitterly attacked in the Old Testament.<sup>178</sup> The same rite is still practiced in India,<sup>179</sup> and survives in the Beltane fires of Ireland, Scotland, northern England and Cornwall, where the people leap through the flames and cause their cattle to do so in order to cleanse them of disease, in quite the old Roman fashion. The crops within the radius of the light from these fires are considered immune from sorcery for the space of a year.<sup>180</sup> The Hottentots purify their sheep in the same way by driving them through the fire,<sup>181</sup> and among the Tartars it is the custom to pass through two fires.<sup>182</sup>

The same notion, as well as that of productivity, is probably also to be connected with the use of this element in the marriage ceremony. "Fax ex spinu alba praefertur, quod purificationis causa adhibetur," says Varro.<sup>183</sup> This power of purification bordered closely on magic, as the torch possessed the ability, both in the Greek and in the Roman conception, to drive away evil spirits.<sup>184</sup> It is rather this idea of its magical

<sup>175</sup> Ov. *Fast.* 4.733 ff., esp. 805.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.* 4.727.

<sup>177</sup> Fowler, *op. cit.* p. 83.

<sup>178</sup> Lev. XVIII, 21: "And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Moloch." Cf. Ezek. XVI, 21; XXIII, 37; Is. L, 11.

<sup>179</sup> T. Maurice, *Antiquities of India*, V, p. 1075.

<sup>180</sup> Forbes Leslie, *Early Races of Scotland*, I, pp. 115 ff.; J. A. Farrer, *op. cit.* pp. 297 ff.

<sup>181</sup> C. P. Thunberg, in *Pinkerton's Voyages and Travels*, XVI, p. 143.

<sup>182</sup> R. Kerr, *Voyages*, I, p. 131.

<sup>183</sup> Apud Charisium, I, p. 144.21 Keil.

Cf. Juv. 2.157-8: "cuperent lustrari, si qua darentur

Sulpura cum taedis et si foret umida laurus."

Novius per Non. p. 516 M: "Sequere me! Puriter volo facias; igni atque aqua hunc volo accipe."

<sup>184</sup> Samter, *G. H. und T.*, p. 74; Erwin Rohde, *Psyche*, I, p. 237.3; J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, p. 39. The Timorlaut natives of the East Indies place infants by the fire to drive evil from them, Ernest Crawley, *Mystic Rose*, p. 226. Cf. Ov. *Fast.* 6.165 ff.

potency that led to the use of fire in the marriage ceremony, than any more spiritual idea, such as a purification of the heart and soul, as Schlesinger<sup>185</sup> thinks; for of such a spiritual conception the early Romans would scarcely have been capable.

With these thoughts in mind it is easier to interpret the legal formula "interdictio aquae et ignis," the sentence which made of the offender an outcast without the right to exercise the privileges of a citizen. If, as is very common, the legal expression for marriage from the woman's viewpoint, "aqua et igni accipi," is interpreted as symbolical of the necessities of life which she was to share with her husband, the corresponding legal phrase of the *interdictio* must then be understood as meaning merely an exclusion from those same rights.<sup>186</sup> But still bearing in mind the purificatory power of fire (and that of water), we may more logically understand the phrase as symbolic of a pure society which the offender would defile by further use of these elements, and for this reason he is cut off from all share in that society, as being unclean and unworthy of sharing in its blessings.<sup>187</sup>

Recalling our formula: yellow = fire = life, we conclude that the use of yellow conveyed the further idea of purification to the Roman mind.

#### YELLOW IN THE CULTS OF THE GODS

One other ceremonial use of yellow, to which the foregoing discussion especially relates, lies in the *crocata* of Bacchus. That the god was represented and thought of as robed in yellow there can be no doubt. Antony, in the garb of Bacchus, "velatus crocata aurea," rides in his triumphal chariot,<sup>188</sup> and Seneca<sup>189</sup> also describes the god in the guise of a maiden, his robe held in place by a yellow girdle. In Greek literature we find the same thing.<sup>190</sup> Of this use of the color in the ceremonial robe of

<sup>185</sup> Max Schlesinger, *Geschichte des Symbols*, p. 251.

<sup>186</sup> Isid. *Orig.* 5.27.38: "Ideo autem Romani aquam et ignem interdicebant quibusdam damnatis, quia aer et aqua cunctis patent et omnibus data sunt; ut illi non fruerentur quod omnibus per naturam concessum est."

<sup>187</sup> Rudolph von Ihering, *Geist des röm. Rechts*, I, p. 288.

<sup>188</sup> Vell. 2.82.4: "crocataque velatus aurea, et thyrsus tenens cothurnisque succinctus curru velut Liber Pater vectus esset." There is manuscript authority for the reading *corona* for *crocata* in this passage.

<sup>189</sup> Sen. *Oed.* 418 ff.

<sup>190</sup> Pollux, 4.117 (ed. Bekker); Callix. ap. Ath. 5. p. 198 c; Aristoph. *Ran.* 45-6, and Schol.

the god there may be two explanations. We find the Roman god Liber associated with Ceres and Libera in the great triad representative of fertility. The later confusion by the Romans of the native Italian divinity Liber with the imported Greek Bacchus or Dionysus has rendered it difficult for scholars to decide what were the original attributes of the native Italic god. But, falling back on the name as an ultimate source, authorities agree that it has something of the same basic meaning as *genius*, and means a "creative, productive spirit, full of blessing" and hence generous and free.<sup>191</sup> In Samothracian genealogy the Greek Dionysus was the son of Hephaestus, the god of fire,<sup>192</sup> and was himself a god of nature.<sup>193</sup> In view of these circumstances it is quite possible to explain the yellow robe of Bacchus as the symbol of his earlier attribute of productivity. But the second idea of which yellow was symbolic suggests another explanation. Yellow was used in the worship of a number of deities and it may have been conceived as being indicative of purity, because the devotee, in coming into the presence of the god, wished to be purified. With this idea, then, we find its use along with fire in the ceremonies of the Egyptian mysteries. The devotee, in the ceremony of initiation to the worship of Isis, bore a torch in imitation of the Sun,<sup>194</sup> and the worshiper of Osiris, as part of the mystic dress, wore a yellow *palla*.<sup>195</sup> The color must have played an important part also in the dress of the worshipers of Cybele, whose ceremonies were of an especially mystic and esoteric nature, for her priests wore not only the *crocata* but also yellow shoes,<sup>196</sup> so that a procession of worshipers such as Apuleius describes must indeed have been a brilliant spectacle. The custom of using the color in the garments of those devoted to a god, or of representing the deity himself as dressed in yellow, is not confined either to Greece and Rome or to their age, for Vishnu

<sup>191</sup> Fowler, *op. cit.* p. 55; G. Wissowa, *Myth. Lex. s. v. Liber*, p. 2022; E. Aust, *Lex. s. v. Juppiter*, p. 662; August. *Civ.* 7.16.

<sup>192</sup> Creuzer, *op. cit.* IV, p. 22.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.* I, p. 468; IV, p. 125.

<sup>194</sup> Apul. *Met.* 11.24: "At manu dextera gerebam flammis adultam facem . . . Sic ad instar Solis . . ."

<sup>195</sup> Tib. 1.7.46: "fusa sed ad teneros lutea palla pedes."

<sup>196</sup> Apul. *Met.* 8.27: "mitellis et crocotis et carbasinis et bombycinis iniecti, . . . pedes luteis inducti calceis."

wore yellow,<sup>197</sup> as do the Buddhist monks of today.<sup>198</sup> Whatever the significance of the employment of yellow among other peoples, a consideration of the evidence of its uses among the Romans, suggests that the purificatory value attributed to it<sup>199</sup> made its use especially appropriate in these divine ceremonies.

#### YELLOW IN MAGIC

The only remaining use of yellow with which the Romans were familiar was not ritualistic, but was an instance of what Frazer<sup>200</sup> calls "homeopathic magic." The Greek word ἰκτερός signified at the same time jaundice and a bird of a greenish yellow color, the sight of which was thought to cure a jaundiced person, with, however, disastrous results for the bird, since it died immediately.<sup>201</sup> A like belief was attached to the stone curlew (χαρᾶδριός),<sup>202</sup> also a yellowish bird, with a large yellow eye.<sup>203</sup> It was probably this yellow eye which was thought to possess curative power, since Plutarch says that the bird received the malady to itself through the eyesight. Bird fanciers kept these birds covered, lest a jaundiced person should look at them and be cured for nothing.<sup>204</sup> Wine in which the feet of a hen had been washed (the hen must be one with yellow feet) was also believed to be a cure for the disease.<sup>205</sup> A stone, the hue of which resembled that of jaundice, was thought to act as a cure,<sup>206</sup> while in Germany yellow turnips, gold coins, gold rings, saffron and other yellow things are still believed to be remedies for this ailment.<sup>207</sup> Almost an exact parallel is found among the Hindus, who tried by magic to banish the yellow color of the disease to yellow creatures and objects. The pa-

<sup>197</sup> Portal, *op. cit.* p. 69.

<sup>198</sup> K. F. Smith on *Tibullus*. 1.7.46.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. *Psa.* LXVIII, 13: "Though ye have lien among the pots, *yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.*"

<sup>200</sup> *Op. cit.* I, p. 79.

<sup>201</sup> Plin. *N. H.* 30.94.

<sup>202</sup> Plut. *Quaest. Conviv.* V, 7.2,8 ff.; Ael. *N. A.* 17.13.

<sup>203</sup> Alfred Newton, *Dict. of Birds*, p. 129.

<sup>204</sup> Schol. Aristoph. *Av.* 266; Schol. Plato, *Gorg.* p. 494 B.

<sup>205</sup> Plin. *N. H.* 30.93.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* 37.170.

<sup>207</sup> Frazer, *op. cit.* I, p. 81.



tient was daubed with yellow porridge and put upon a bed, to the foot of which were tied three yellow birds by a yellow string. Into these birds the malady was thought to pass, after a spell had been uttered by the priest<sup>208</sup>: "Up to the Sun shall go thy jaundice, in the color of the red bull do we envelope thee. . . Into parrots, thrushes and yellow wag-tails do we put thy jaundice."<sup>209</sup>

The whole idea is entirely one of magic and cannot be connected with the ritualistic symbolism of the color, but the notion is perfectly obvious. The ancients knew that in jaundice there was an excess of yellow in the complexion, and they thought that by spells they could exorcise the abhorrent quality and drive it into some object of nature, which, by reason of its own similar color, would readily absorb both the disease and the accompanying excess of yellow. In the case of the Hindus, the patient tried at the same time by other magical means to apply to himself the healthy redness which he saw all about him in nature.

#### CONCLUSION

In a summary of this investigation no well defined line can be drawn between the use of the words most important to the study, *luteus* and *croceus*. We have shown from passages of literature that there actually was a difference in their chromatic value. *Luteus* denotes tints of yellow shading toward green, *croceus* a more reddish hue, while *flavus* is of small importance both in color differentiation and in symbolic significance. The Romans apparently made no logical and uniform distinction in their use of the three words, and yellow was used in ritual probably without reference to shade.

The most important instance of the use of the color was in the *flammeum*, the marriage veil. The yellow shoes which the bride also wore may have been used by women in general, as were the four yellow garments, the *crocota*, the *crocotula*, the *epicrocum*, and the *caltula*. In the case of these robes it is impossible to make any distinction as to shade. Except for

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.* p. 79.

<sup>209</sup> *Atharva-Veda*, 1.22, see *SBE.*, vol. XLII, p. 7-8, 263. Perhaps the same idea is found in Bavaria, Saxony and Bohemia, where the cross-bill, whose plumage is crimson and flame color, is kept in the homes of peasants to ward off fire and lightning, Frazer, *op. cit.* p. 82.

the names which designated them, names derived from yellow flowers the color of which they imitated, there is no evidence upon which to base a conclusion.

In order to discover the symbolic idea expressed by the use of yellow, we have studied the practices most nearly associated with its employment. In the marriage ceremony fire played a part second only to that of the *flammeum*, and a number of passages of literature would substantiate the view that the two were connected in thought and that yellow was the chromatic symbol of fire.

A study of the use of fire in the wedding ceremony and of other evidence leads to the conclusion that this element was symbolic of productivity and life, and it is these two ideas which yellow in the marriage rite and in women's garments symbolized.

Yellow was worn by Bacchus and by worshipers of Cybele and Osiris. Since the former was originally a god of creation and productivity, the employment of the color in his cult can also be classed as symbolic of these functions. The ideas of life and fertility were not as prominent, however, in the cults of Cybele and of Osiris as in that of Bacchus, and we must therefore look farther for a solution in these cases.

Fire in almost all of the religious systems of the world, including that of Rome, has been considered an agent of purification. Therefore the use of its chromatic symbol, yellow, in the cults of Cybele and of Osiris was perhaps thought to cleanse the devotees and make them fit for communion with the deity. This second idea of purification may also play some part in the cult of Bacchus.

The only remaining use of yellow with which the Romans were familiar was in the magic practices by which a jaundiced person tried to drive the disease from himself into yellow creatures or objects.

In consideration of this possible explanation of the significance attached to yellow, and of the familiarity of the ideas of fertility and purification to the Roman mind, it is strange that no use of the color is found in the many ceremonies of the indigenous Italic divinities or in the dress of their priests. The deities in whose rituals it appears are foreign to Rome, and we are tempted to believe that in the thought of the early Roman the use of the color was indeed, as Pliny states, confined to women.

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